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NEWS
FROM YOUR MUSEUM
THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Know your Museum better

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GREAT GRAY OWL SIGHTED

In the past 36 years, there have been only two records of Great Gray Owls at Toronto—one in January, 1935, and one on January 12th of the present year, found by T. M. Shortt, of the Royal Ontario Museum.

The Great Gray Owl of the far Northwest is the largest of all the owls—with a wingspread exceeding five feet.

During some winters, numbers of them desert their accustomed grounds and invade Eastern Canada and the northern United States, probably due to a failure in their food supply—mice, shrews and other small mammals.

Since the great flight of 1889-90 (when one Toronto taxidermist alone received 23 specimens to be mounted), there were almost annual visitations until 1910-11, when they apparently ceased.

Indications point to the complete disappearance of the Grey Gray Owl unless thoughtless shooters allow them to visit us with impunity. Big winter invasions seem to be a thing of the past—in the Toronto region at any rate.

Man's treatment of Nature has been a grim story. Let us make sure that these owls do not join the ranks of the Passenger Pigeon and Great Auk—earlier victims of man's folly.

PUZZLES FOUND IN ROCKS

That the devil put fossils in the rocks to confuse mankind was a fantastic idea once held, but modern science has done much to solve these rock puzzles. We know, after the past century of intensive research that fossil remains provide us with the means to study many forms of ancient life. Most fossils are the incomplete remains of the hard parts of organisms. Soft parts, except in unusual cases, are not saved. Sometimes it is simply the footprint or trail left by an animal of long ago or the impression of a leaf, preserved for us in rock, that gives the clue to its identity. In the galleries of the Royal Ontario Museum, artists and scientists have combined their talents to help us visualize the lands and waters of the ancient world as they might have appeared when teeming with living organisms. In the study cases we may learn that, although Canada is considered a "young" country today, she has a fossil history dating back millions of years. Fossils from Durham, Wiarton, St. Mary's, Thedford, Ottawa, as well as those from Toronto, and many other Ontario sites, are definitely of the "old" world type.

ANTLER-SHEDDING TIME

Our zoologists tell us that moose and deer shed their antlers during a period extending from December to March, the older animals losing them first. Surprisingly few antlers are found lying about the woods since rodents such as squirrels, mice and porcupines gnaw away at them. Antler is one of the hardest types of bone, too.

COMING EVENTS AT THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Feb. 1st—8.15 p.m. Family Night Travel Film "Janosik" (Czechslovakia).
Feb. 3rd—8.00 p.m. Toronto Field Naturalists.
Feb. 12th—8.00 p.m. Opening of a gallery of "Excavated History"—Indian and French material from the villages of Huronia.
Feb. 14 and 15th—8.15 p.m. Family Night Travel Film "Devil's Island—Martinique."
Feb. 20th—22nd—8.30 p.m. "Mr. Balfry"—New Play Society.
Feb. 28th—8.15 p.m. Family Night Travel Film "Wedding of Palo" and others on Eskimo life.

NEW GALLERY TO BE OPENED

September 3rd, 1946, is an important date in the annals of the Royal Ontario Museum, for it was then that members of the Archaeological staff under the guidance of Professor T. F. McIlwraith began excavating near Coldwater the site of what is believed to be Cahiagué, a Huron Indian village. The Orillia Board of Trade lent its support to this project.

Cahiagué, Samuel de Champlain's headquarters in 1615, was abandoned by the Huron Indians before the Jesuit fathers opened their Mission at Fort Ste. Marie near Midland, in 1639.

A wealth of material was turned up by the searchers who were directed by Miss Margaret Thomson, Professor McIlwraith's assistant. They found sherds of clay pots and of clay pipes, gaming pieces, bone tools, wampum and catlinite beads which had been in use before the white man came. Pieces of copper kettle made into arrow points, iron tools and glass beads used in trade indicate the French influence on the Hurons. At the bottom of the communal burial pit, under a solid mass of bones, were two complete skeletons. From a careful study of these remains a great deal was learned about the health, physique, and life expectancy of the Hurons

To illustrate both Indian and French material from Cahiagué and other villages of Huronia—the district bounded roughly by Nottawasaga Bay, Matchedash Bay, the Severn River, Lake Couchiching, Lake Simcoe, and with a southern boundary on a line near Barrie and running north-east again to Nottawasaga Bay—a new gallery will be opened in the Royal Ontario Museum on February 12th.

An exposition of the results of the work done at the time of the excavation described has been set forth in pamphlet form, with illustrations. It is hoped that by correlating this information with the material to be displayed in the special gallery, both the interest in and the understanding of the science of archaeology will be increased. It is hoped, too, that this display will be more fully appreciated as a component of Canadian history.

AMETHYST FOR FEBRUARY

The transparent, purple variety of the mineral, quartz, is called amethyst and is considered to be the birthstone for February. It is the most valuable of the large variety of semi-precious quartz gems.

In the Royal Ontario Museum there are large, deep-coloured amethyst crystals from Brazil. There are smaller, paler, crystals from Nova Scotia and Port Arthur, Ontario. Faceted stones of both types are displayed.

In amethyst the colour is not evenly distributed throughout the stone. It is therefore difficult to cut it to the best advantage, that is, to show the deepest colour. Attempts are usually made to get the darkest part at the lowest point of the cut stone so that it will show throughout.

This gem has always been associated with temperance and sobriety. In the past it was believed to cure or to prevent drunkenness Since early times it has been used in ecclesiastical rings.